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STATE FOR USOAS, WHA/EPSC, WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/28/2018

TAGS: PREL OAS CU TT

SUBJECT: T&T PRIME MINISTER RAISES CUBA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE NEXT SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS WITH U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE OAS

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 121

Classified By: Ambassador Roy L. Austin, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Manning asked visiting USOAS Ambassador Morales what it would take for the U.S. to agree to Cuba's participation in the next Summit of the Americas. Asserting that there is "clear change" in Cuba, Manning said he hopes the U.S. would relax its stance. Morales responded by making it clear that the US would oppose any effort to include Cuba in the Summit. He said that the U.S. hopes to see real change in Cuba, and he underscored that the 34 democracies of the Hemisphere have agreed that democracy and the rule of law are the conditions for participating in the Summit. Manning indicated that CARICOM Heads would put the same question to the U.S. presidential candidates, whom they were seeking to meet during the mid-June Caribbean conference in New York. Manning also shared views on Summit themes and relations with the U.S. and Venezuela. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) US Ambassador to the OAS Hector Morales and Ambassador Austin met with Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) Prime Minister Patrick Manning on May 19 to discuss preparations for the Fifth Summit of the Americas, which will take place in Port of Spain in April 2009. Manning was joined by Ambassador Luis Alberto Rodriguez, the GOT National Summit Coordinator, as well as Nieves Callendar and Page DeLeon from the Office of the Prime Minister. State/E Special Assistant Tom Pierce and A/DCM also attended.

¶3. (SBU) Manning said he is looking for the right opportunity to announce the dates of the Summit, which will be April 17-19, 2009. (NOTE: T&T's Foreign Minister subsequently announced the April 17-19 dates at the OAS General Assembly meeting in Medellin.) He noted that it will be the first of two summit meetings taking place next year in Port of Spain, followed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October 2009. Morales responded that the Summit will also be the first opportunity for a new U.S. President to meet with the other 34 democratically elected leaders of the hemisphere.

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Cuba at the Summit ) What would it take?  
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¶4. (C) Keying off the reference to democracy, Manning asked what it would take for the U.S. to agree to Cuba's participation in the Summit. While professing to understand the U.S. position, Manning asserted that Raul Castro is "not the same as Fidel" and that there is "clear change" taking place in Cuba. He added that even U.S. companies are positioning themselves in expectation that Cuba will open up. In response, Morales told Manning that the U.S. would oppose any effort to include Cuba in the Summit. Morales noted that the U.S. would not be alone in this opposition, saying that the 34 democracies of the Hemisphere have agreed that

democracy and the rule of law are the conditions for participating in the Summit. He cited both the Quebec Summit declaration and the Inter-American Democratic Charter as precedents. With respect to conditions in Cuba, Morales underscored that the U.S. hopes to see real change.

¶ 15. (C) Manning argued that in light of U.S. relations with China, it appears "duplicitous" for the U.S. to hold on to an "extreme" position on Cuba. As Cuba makes "a move to liberalize," Manning continued, he hoped the U.S. would also move to relax its policies. The Quebec Summit declaration may have been appropriate in 2001, he added, but circumstances have changed. Manning indicated that he would raise the issue again during visits to the U.S., including the upcoming Caribbean conference in New York, where CARICOM Heads hope to engage the U.S. presidential candidates. Morales reiterated that the U.S. hopes to see real change in Cuba such as free and fair elections and human rights improvements, but stressed that both this U.S. administration and the next one will continue to view the issue of Summit participation in accordance with past hemispheric commitments.

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Summit Themes  
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¶ 16. (C) Turning to SOA themes, Morales welcomed T&T's focus on human prosperity, energy security, and environmental sustainability, but he also signaled that leaders would need to be careful not to make commitments on climate change that might harm the region's competitiveness. While Manning did not comment on whether T&T would seek a mandate on climate change at the Summit, he did avow that as a regional center

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of heavy industry T&T would do its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He further commented that he saw no viable alternatives to replace fossil fuels, although he hoped to see reconsideration of nuclear power in developed countries.

¶ 17. (C) On security, Manning said the key issue for the Caribbean is drug trafficking, a problem "not of our making." Successful counter-narcotics efforts in Mexico and Colombia had diverted the drug trade to the Eastern Caribbean. T&T was doing its part by strengthening its own defenses, helping to upgrade the Regional Security System's fleet of C-26 aircraft, and making resources available to less prosperous islands by contributing US\$79 million annually to the CARICOM Petroleum Fund. Nevertheless, while the Caribbean understands the need for self-reliance, Manning urged the U.S. not to underestimate the region's susceptibility to corruption at the hands of drug traffickers. He also relayed that T&T will convene a "commanders' conference" in mid-June for Southern Caribbean nations to discuss with the U.S. and other outside partners how best to cooperate on regional security.

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Relations with the U.S., Venezuela  
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¶ 18. (C) On bilateral relations, Manning briefly noted his past sense that the U.S. had taken for granted T&T's role in U.S. energy security as the leading supplier of liquefied natural gas. Manning indicated that the relationship has improved, thanks in part to the recent visit of U.S. Energy Secretary Bodman, and he said he would welcome a visit by the Secretary of Defense as well.

¶ 19. (C) Manning described T&T's relations with Venezuela as "not what they should be" and said he is attempting to change that. He had spoken with Hugo Chavez on the margins of the recent EU-Latin America meeting in Lima, and the two had agreed to meet "at the earliest opportunity."

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Summit Coordinator Downplays Cuba

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¶10. (C) In a follow-on meeting May 20, TT National Summit Coordinator Rodriguez professed surprise that Manning had raised Cuba with Morales, and he asserted that the issue had never come up in his own extensive consultations with the Prime Minister on Summit preparations. Morales told Rodriguez that if Cuba's participation in the Summit is a priority for T&T, it would create a significant problem and result in the US not participating. Rodriguez said he was not in a position to interpret Manning's words, but he sought to put the PM's question into the context of ongoing regional discussion of how Cuba might play "a more effective role" in the Caribbean. Rodriguez asserted that T&T's priorities for the Summit are poverty, the environment, food security, and energy security, and T&T does not want Cuba to become a Summit "side-show" that would divert attention from these issues.

AUSTIN